



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

For Release May 4, 1989

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INTERIOR SECRETARY LUJAN ANNOUNCES OPENING OF NEW SEA OTTER RESCUE FACILITY, PRAISES VOLUNTEER RESCUE EFFORTS

Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan announced that a new sea otter rehabilitation center, funded by the Exxon Corporation, will open today in Seward, Alaska. The facility will be manned by 120 volunteers who will treat otters affected by oil slicks that have drifted to nearby areas of the Gulf of Alaska.

The Secretary also said he was encouraged by the rate of donations to the Alaskan Fish and Wildlife Restoration Fund, established two weeks ago by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation at his and Congressional requests.

To date, almost 600 contributions, totalling almost \$25,000, have been received, Lujan said. Donations are being used to aid the recovery of injured fish, birds and other wildlife and to monitor the spill's long term effects on their recovery.

At the height of the wildlife rescue efforts following the spill from the tanker Exxon Valdez, more that 500 volunteers were working 12 to 18 hour days in Valdez, Homer and Kodiak helping to catch and clean sea otters, birds and other wildlife, he said.

"This valiant effort by dedicated and concerned citizens shows that the volunteer spirit is alive and well across the land and that Americans are willing to give of themselves to protect great natural heritage of the land they love," Lujan said.

Contributions to the Alaskan Fish and Wildlife Restoration Fund should be made payable to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and sent to: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Alaskan Fish and Wildlife Restoration Fund, 18th and C Streets NW, Room 2556, Washington, D.C. 20240.

There is a limited need for volunteers with special skills, such as veterinary medicine and computer operation. Information on volunteers may be obtained by called the Valdez Response Center at 907-835-2674, or Anchorage Volunteer Response Center at 907-276-3688.